DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 157 CE 076 454

TITLE	Further Education for the New Millennium. The Learning Age.
INSTITUTION	Department for Education and Employment, London (England).
PUB DATE	1998-02-25
NOTE	21p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Change Strategies; Educational Change; Educational Finance; *Educational Opportunities; *Educational Policy; Foreign Countries; *Government School Relationship; *Lifelong Learning; Partnerships in Education; Position Papers; Postsecondary Education; *Public Policy; Strategic Planning; *Student Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS	*Great Britain

ABSTRACT

This document presents the British government's response to the report "Learning Works," which was written by a committee charged with identifying ways of engaging individuals who have traditionally not taken advantage of educational opportunities. Chapter 1 outlines the following steps that the government proposes to take to promote lifelong learning: extend learning opportunities; make education and training more flexible and accessible; remove barriers to learning; invest in young people; improve the quality, responsiveness, and local accountability of further education colleges; secure improvements in information on learning; and rebalance the partnership for investment in learning. The following government strategies for promoting lifelong learning are discussed in chapters 2-7: widen participation in lifelong learning based on increasing access to learning and providing opportunities for success and progression; form strong partnerships to develop efficient local strategies for learning; factor the need to widen post-16 learning into the Comprehensive Spending Review; develop more equitable mechanisms for financing further education; promote and encourage good practice in widening participation and keep the qualifications framework for post-16 under close review; and stimulate the demand for learning through a coherent system of information, advice, and guidance. (MN)

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ED 419 157

The Learning Age

Further Education for the **New Millennium**

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The Government's Response to "*Learning Works*" – The report of the Further Education Funding Council's committee on widening participation in Further Education, chaired by Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
SANCTUARY BUILDINGS GREAT SMITH STREET
WESTMINSTER LONDON SW1P 3BT
TELEPHONE 0171 925 5000
The Rt Hon DAVID BLUNKETT MP

25 February 1998

Lord Davies of Oldham
Chairman,
Further Education Funding Council (FEFC)

Dear Bryan,

I have great pleasure in publishing today our response to those recommendations in Helena Kennedy's report on widening participation which were directed to the Government.

I first want to thank the members of the widening participation committee who have produced a report which has stirred the imagination of many, and thrown a clear spotlight on the world of further education – a sector which makes an immense, but often unappreciated, contribution to the nation's social and economic well-being.

We have also published today *The Learning Age*, our consultation paper on lifelong learning, and the formal response to the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education's report Higher Education in the Learning Society. These documents stress the coherence of our vision. Further and Higher Education are integral to the whole of our lifelong learning agenda, and the Government's new vision can only be fulfilled if both sectors respond to the challenge of creating a learning society.

Widening participation in further education (FE) is a big challenge, but it is one the Government wants to embrace. We are grateful to the FEFC for the significant work it has already undertaken to implement the agenda. We set out in this document the way in which we shall seek to work with the FEFC, FE colleges and other partners in fulfilling the vision more fully – by developing learning opportunities, extending access, increasing the availability and flexibility of learning, and removing financial barriers to learning. We commend and endorse the powerful message in *Learning Works*.

David Blunkett

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 This paper sets out the Government's response to the report, *Learning Works*, of the Committee on Widening Participation, chaired by Baroness Kennedy, and established by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) in 1994. The report of the Committee was delivered to the Council in June 1997.

1.2 The report sets out a radical vision to engage and draw back into learning those who have traditionally not taken advantage of educational opportunities: in particular, those with no or inadequate qualifications. For these people, continuing or returning to learning offers the prospect of breaking out of a cycle of economic and social exclusion. The Government endorses the vision of the report.

1.3 The Government has already begun work. We have announced additional funding, totalling some £100 million, to provide for up to 80,000 additional students in further education over the next year, with the great majority to be drawn from the educationally disadvantaged population. We are working with the FEFC to ensure that the additional money is effectively targeted at the educationally disadvantaged, and that the Council's funding methodology fairly reflects the costs of providing for such students.

1.4 This represents a beginning. Our wider proposals for lifelong learning are set out in *The Learning Age*, published today as a basis for consultation. We will

- extend learning opportunities to many people who would not otherwise have the chance to learn by providing for an extra 500,000 people in further and higher education by 2002;

- make education and training more flexible and accessible for all. FE colleges already have a notable track record in this regard; the University for Industry (UfI) will build on this, with FE colleges and other partners;

- remove barriers to learning through

  the introduction of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) which should particularly help those with low skills or low pay, and who may not qualify for automatic course fee exemption; and

  by introducing a new improved system of support for further education students to replace the system of Local Education Authority (LEA) discretionary awards;

- invest in Young People so that as many as possible are motivated and enabled to study beyond 16;

- improve the quality, responsiveness and local accountability of FE colleges;

- secure improvements in information on learning and related career opportunities through a better focused careers service and other sources, including the Learning Direct Helpline, launched today; and

- rebalance the partnership for investment in learning between the Government, individuals and employers. We have made a start on this in FE by asking the FEFC to secure an additional £20m in employer contributions in 1998-99.

1.5 We are confident that the FE sector has the will and the ability to play a major part in realising this agenda. It has demonstrated this in the breadth of its provision: catering for 4 million students, 80% of them adults, studying for a total of 17,000 different qualifications in 1995/96, and expanding its provision by over a quarter in the past four years. Despite this record, about one in four adults has not done any recent learning. This is what we need to rectify, and we therefore welcome the enthusiasm of the sector colleges and their partners; and the way they have already embraced the message of *Learning Works*.

1.6 Achieving the aim will require a continuing drive to raise standards, including action by each college to improve the quality of teaching in order to increase attainment and improve retention. We look forward to working constructively with the Council, and colleges and others, to make the vision of widening participation a reality.

Further details on all the recommendations directed to Government are set out below. The report was directed to the FEFC for England, and its recommendations to the Government do not therefore apply to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The unnumbered recommendations are organised thematically, not in the order in which they are presented in *Learning Works*. They appear in *italics*, with references to the relevant chapter in *Learning Works - eg [LW Ch 3]*.

Chapter 2
The Framework for Widening Participation

This Government is committed to the establishment of a learning society in which all people have opportunities to succeed. Increasing access to learning and providing opportunities for success and progression are fundamental to the Government's strategy. These are the keys to social cohesion and economic success.

> *The Government should provide leadership to place the creation of a self-perpetuating learning society at the heart of the national common purpose [LW Ch 1];*
>
> *should create a national strategy for post-16 learning to widen not simply increase participation [LW Ch 1]; and*
>
> *should set new and comprehensive "National Learning Targets"[LW Ch 1]*

1.1 The Government recognises that it must give the lead in creating a learning society. It has set out its vision in *The Learning Age*. That places learning at the heart of our economic and social policies. It reflects the Government's determination that lifelong learning should be for the many, and not just the few. Investing in Young People, the University for Industry and Individual Learning Accounts are essential elements in this strategy.

1.2 The Government issued a consultation document, *Targets for our Future*, in December 1997. We have set out alternative options for targets for post-school achievement by young people; a target for adults; and a target for employers. National targets are a means of encouraging everyone to develop their talents, and to realise their potential. It is essential to set targets in areas relevant to the needs of the economy in the years ahead, and to provide benchmarks by which we can measure national progress in improving skills and gaining qualifications. We will set out new targets in the light of the consultation, which ends next month.

> *The Government should recognise and celebrate the unique contribution that further education can make to widening participation [LW Ch 2]*

1.3 The Government recognises the FE sector as central to its educational policies and wider social agenda. We have already backed that with announcements of some £100 million of additional funding for colleges compared with previous plans, and will take forward the future needs of the sector within our Departmental Spending Review. We have taken opportunities to promote and to endorse the widespread excellence and good practice which exists within colleges.

The Government should state its aspiration for all to achieve a level 3 qualification including key skills to provide the platform for the creation of a self-perpetuating learning society [LW Ch 1]

should give priority in public funding within post-16 learning to general education and transferable vocational learning, including key skills, at and leading to level 3; the costs of ensuring that all can succeed to level 3 must be recognised [LW Ch 4] ; and

should ensure that education to level 3 is free for all young people, and for adults without basic skills or who are socially or economically deprived; tax relief should be extended to all learning programmes up to level 3 which are funded by individuals [LW Ch 4]

1.1 As set out in Chapter 2 of *The Learning Age*, the aim of public funding should be to increase participation and attainment at all levels where that will provide most benefit for society. The Government recognises the urgency of improving the nation's qualification base. Skills audits show that there is also very significant underachievement compared with other industrial nations at lower levels. 7 million adults have no formal qualifications, and the number of jobs requiring low level skills is declining. 62% of the adult population of working age does not have a level 3 qualification, and over 20% of adults have poor basic skills. To widen participation, we must concentrate, at least initially, on those with few if any qualifications: people who usually also experience social and economic disadvantage. By using greater attainment at level 2 as a stepping stone, we will encourage more people to attain level 3. This will be a benchmark of our long term success.

1.1 Tax relief already exists for many vocational courses. Our proposals for Individual Learning Accounts will assist many people to study to level 3. All basic skills courses will continue to be free. The Government is committed to ensuring that learning in the key skills becomes a common part of the education and training of young people after 16.

Chapter 3
Partnerships

The Government believes that the excessive emphasis in the past on market competition has inhibited collaboration; and that strong partnerships are now needed to develop efficient local strategies for learning

> *The Government should enable the establishment of a national system of permanent local strategic partnerships to widen participation; the partnerships should support the Council in its duty to secure the provision of sufficient and adequate further education [LW Ch 3]; and*
>
> *should expect local partnerships to set local participation targets [LW Ch 1]*

1.1 This Government has stressed a partnership approach in planning education and training provision. That is central to the Investing in Young People strategy. We look to the FEFC's regional committees to be effective partners with local government and other providers in improving co-operation in meeting the needs of 16-19 year olds, developing local skill strategies and setting regional targets. The new Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) will also work with FEFC, colleges, local authorities, Higher Education Institutions and Training and Enterprise Councils to develop effective co-operation on strategies for lifelong learning – for example, identifying future skill needs. We are also placing a new emphasis on partnerships within the sector, to reduce the waste caused by unnecessary competition, and to ensure that the sector is better placed to meet future challenges. We have established a new Further Education Collaboration Fund to promote such partnerships within and beyond the FE sector.

> *The Government should in creating the 'University for Industry', draw upon the expertise of the Council, further education providers and other key organisations, to develop a service which will meet the needs of the widest spectrum of learners, and support the 'New Learning Pathway' [LW Ch 9]; and*
>
> *should make it a key role of the local strategic partnerships to promote clear and consistent messages about the value of learning and the range of opportunities available, and to collaborate with the 'University for Industry' at local level [LW Ch 9]*

1.1 The UfI will act as the hub of a new learning network, linking people and businesses to the education and training they need, using modern communication technology. FE colleges and other providers will play a full part in the UfI network, for example by acting as local learning centres, and by providing commissioned courses to fill gaps in learning needs. By making it easier for individuals and

companies to learn, the Ufl will be a major means of widening participation. One target group will be those in need of basic skills training.

The Government should promote the establishment of employers' learning centres as part of the 'University for Industry'; firms with over 200 employees should set up their new centres, and smaller firms should be encouraged to work together to create them [LW Ch 2] ;

should encourage local partnerships to identify openings for introducing new employee development schemes[LW Ch 2]; and

should extend tax incentives to encourage private sector employers to establish employee development schemes[LW Ch 4]

1.1 The Government will foster the widespread establishment of company learning centres, with close links to the Ufl, in both public and private sectors. *The Learning Age* supports further development of partnership between employers, employees and their unions, including employee development schemes. We have already announced that we shall provide £2 million towards an employee education development fund next year. The launch of the Ufl will encourage commerce and industry to establish both of these types of initiative. The Government has reaffirmed its commitment to making Investors in People the general standard across the public and private sectors, and in large and small companies.

The Government should encourage local education authorities to produce annual development plans setting out their proposals for securing adequate provision for non-schedule 2 students [LW Ch 2]; and

should explore urgently all avenues for ensuring the availability of adequate funding for non-schedule 2 provision, including alternative funding routes [LW Ch 2]

1.1 The Government is clear that adult education provided by local authorities and voluntary bodies has an important contribution to make to *The Learning Age*. We will shortly be consulting the Local Government Association, the FEFC and others about proposals for local access plans and arrangements for courses outside the scope of Schedule 2 to the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

The Government should revise the articles of government of sector colleges to give corporations a responsibility to meet the needs of the local community [LW Ch 3]

1.1 The Government expects FE colleges to be accountable, open and responsive to their local communities, although their independence will be preserved. We shall shortly publish a consultation document, setting out a range of proposals designed to improve accountability and conduct in the FE sector.

The Government should develop the role of the Employment Service in promoting the value of, and the opportunities for, learning, particularly to those with little recent experience of learning or who lack basic skills and qualifications [LW Ch 9]

1.1 The Employment Service already takes on the important role of advising clients on the learning opportunities available to them. It has a pivotal role in the New Deal, which includes education and training in all its strands. The successful development of this role will be linked with the growing influence of strategic partnerships and funding mechanisms to encourage wider participation.

Chapter 4
Funding as a lever for change

Through its Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government is taking into account the need to widen participation in post-16 learning

> *The Government should create a consistent policy framework for publicly-funded further education which embraces planning, funding, quality assessment, measurement of performance, financial support for students, guidance and the means of stimulating demand for learning [LW Ch 2]*

1.1 *The Learning Age* sets out the key elements of such a framework, including the issues of quality assessment, performance and target setting. The Investing in Young People strategy is a coherent approach to maximising participation and attainment by 16-18 year olds.

1.1 In the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which all Government Departments are undertaking to review priorities and spending across their budgets, Ministers are considering options for creating greater equity in post-16 funding. For careers education and guidance, there will be a refocusing of effort towards those who most need help across all the sectors. The School Standards and Framework Bill contains measures concerned with local planning and decision-making in the schools sector. Consistent with that, Ministers will be giving strong encouragement to FEFC and the Local Government Association to collaborate with other partners in developing a more co-ordinated approach to post-16 planning and delivery. Student support is considered below at paragraphs 5.1-5.4; and more detail on quality assessment is given at paragraph 6.2.

> *The Government should create a 'Learning Nation Fund' from the national lottery funds released after the millennium to achieve the quantum leap in participation in post-16 learning needed to tackle the backlog of underachievement [LW Ch 4]*
>
> *should review the current range of challenge funds and specific funds to improve the coherence of funding locally and to minimise bureaucracy [LW Ch 4]*
>
> *should redirect the priorities of the Single Regeneration Budget towards learning [LW Ch 4]; and*
>
> *should create a 'Learning Regeneration Fund' to provide incentives and reward for the permanent local strategic partnerships we recommend should be set up to widen participation [LW Ch 4]*

1.2 The Government's commitment to provide for an extra 500,000 people in further and higher education by 2002 is being taken forward within the Comprehensive Spending Review.

1.3 As announced in *The Learning Age* we shall consult on setting up an Adult and Community Learning Fund to sustain and encourage new schemes to help people gain access to learning, including courses in basic numeracy and literacy. The Government will make £5 million available next year to match contributions from trusts, charities and businesses.

1.4 It is too early to make firm decisions on the post-Millennium Lottery funding stream. The Government will carefully consider the proposal for a "learning nation fund", alongside other proposals, at the appropriate time. A total of £700 million of Lottery funding has already been committed to nationwide provision for out of school learning and childcare, training of teachers and librarians in information technology, and for creating digital versions of a range of cultural material.

1.5 The Single Regeneration Budget Challenge fund already supports local partnerships in lifelong learning initiatives. We will consider the other recommendations above sympathetically with other Government Departments, taking account of other developments, including the prospective establishment of Regional Development Agencies.

> *The Government should create a national framework for the funding of post-16 learning; the new system should be founded on the principle of equity and it should be simple and transparent [LW Ch 4]*
>
> *should harmonise funding systems and funding levels across the whole of further education [LW Ch 4]; and*
>
> *should include in the common principles for the harmonised funding incentives and recognition of the relative costs required to widen participation [LW Ch 4]*

1.6 These recommendations also have to be seen in the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review. *The Learning Age* proposes broad principles to underpin public investment in post-16 learning. The Government will continue to examine and refine the present system, with appropriate consultation and with an eye to the key principles of simplicity, transparency, equity and effectiveness. We support the recent decisions by the FEFC to ensure that widening participation is encouraged, for example through a weighting in the funding methodology which allocates additional resources in respect of students from socially disadvantaged areas.

> *The Government should set out clearly the relative contributions to be made from the public purse, by employers and by individuals in paying for learning [LW Ch 4]*

1.1 The Government has already set out, as a general principle, that it wishes to see a fairer balance between the state's and employers' contributions to the cost of employer-led provision, and believes that employers should be meeting at least 50% of the costs of such FEFC funded provision. *The Learning Age* proposes a new partnership for investment in learning between the Government, individuals and employers. A key element of this will be a national system of Individual Learning Accounts, which will provide a means of targeting public support where it is most needed. All those with an interest in encouraging individual learning – including individuals, employers and Government – will be able to invest in them. *The Learning Age* describes how we shall explore, with FEFC and colleges, how to develop Learning Account funding methods in FE.

Chapter 5
New Systems of Financial Support

The Government is urgently reviewing the mechanisms for financial and practical support for students in Further Education, and has already brought forward measures to make the system more equitable.

> *The Government should undertake a major review of financial support for further education students [LW Ch 6]; and*
>
> *should ensure that principles of fairness and transparency apply to financial support for learners throughout post-16 education [LW Ch 6]*

1.1 The Government's objectives in relation to student support include making sure that those people who have not participated in learning since leaving school are encouraged and helped to return; and that personal or family hardship is not a barrier to taking up learning opportunities. We are examining ways of targeting support on those from low income households and on those faced with exceptional costs associated with study. The current funding arrangements are not well integrated and are unevenly administered; any change, therefore, will aim also to replace these arrangements with a coherent system of support for students of all ages in further education. The principles are set out in chapter 2 of *The Learning Age*, which sets these in the wider context, including the parallel changes which the Government is proposing in relation to students in Higher Education.

1.1 The Government has already announced proposals to change the current system of discretionary awards provided by LEAs, since it is inequitable and not meeting student needs. The Government has set up an advisory group, under the Chairmanship of Councillor Graham Lane, which will report in March, and will advise Ministers on fairer, more effective arrangements to replace LEA discretionary awards. This will enable the Government to make the most effective use of the resources available and deliver coherence in further education student support. It is hoped that new arrangements can be introduced in 1999/2000.

> *The Government should increase significantly access funds for the college sector and remove the current restrictions on eligibility until the review is complete [LW Ch 6]*

1.1 The Government has already announced a 50% increase in access funds for distribution by FE colleges, from £6 million in 1997/98 to £9 million in 1998/99. These funds will go directly to students in financial difficulties to pay for books, transport or other costs of studying. Questions of eligibility will be taken forward in the light of advice from the Government's advisory group.

The Government should give priority within the public funding which is available for financial support to students to increase the numbers of people aiming to achieve level 3 [LW Ch 6]

1.1 The Government considers that it is important to support all students in accordance with their financial need, whatever the level of study. The drive to increase the number of young people reaching level 3 will continue. The Government also wants to focus on helping people of all ages strengthen their basic skills of literacy and numeracy, and helping as many young people as possible to become qualified to level 2, in line with Investing in Young People.

The Government should consider fully the implications for widening participation of any detailed proposals for individual learning accounts [LW Ch 6]

1.1 The targeting of a proportion of the first one million publicly funded Individual Learning Accounts to help low-skilled workers, people employed in small firms and others, will be a key mechanism for widening participation.

The Government should evaluate the impact of the Job-Seekers' Allowance, and recognise the contribution that achieving qualifications can make to individuals seeking, securing and retaining jobs [LW Ch 6]

1.1 The Government has announced that it will review the Job-Seekers' Allowance (JSA) legislation on education and training in the light of both the recently extended JSA Workskill Pilots and early experience from the New Deal. We will amend the JSA rules so that those over 25, and who have been unemployed for over 2 years, can study full time for up to a year without having to be available for employment in term time.

Chapter 6
Making Widening Participation Happen

The Government will promote and encourage good practice in widening participation, and will keep the qualifications framework for post-16 learning under close review.

> *The Government should create a national partnership to develop a credit framework for implementation within the next five years [LW Ch 7]*

1.1 Responses to the recent consultation on post-16 qualifications showed that there is considerable support, particularly from the FE sector, for moving towards a qualifications framework structured in terms of units of credit. This could lead to easier access, greater flexibility and the recognition of smaller steps of achievement. Such an approach is particularly relevant to the needs of adults, and to vocational, general vocational and access awards. As indicated in *The Learning Age*, such a qualifications framework would recognise achievement in work and through other voluntary and family activities, while being a stimulus to learning. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is proposing to undertake further work on the development of a unit-based credit framework, with particular reference to the needs of lifelong and vocational learning.

> *The Government should commission work to develop a national system for measuring learning gain in all forms of post-16 learning [LW Ch 7];*
>
> *should include widening participation in the common standards for harmonised systems of quality assurance and measurement of performance across further education [LW Ch 7]; and*
>
> *should accelerate its activities to harmonise systems for measuring participation and achievement in post-16 learning and publish an annual report on progress in participation and achievement [LW Ch 1]*

1.1 *The Learning Age* states that the Government will improve and harmonise post-16 inspection arrangements across schools, colleges and training providers, including setting in place the new independent training inspectorate. In partnership with the relevant bodies concerned, the Government will seek to develop a national framework and common procedures and grading systems; and to publish consistent performance indicators for individual providers. It will seek to establish targets to which all concerned are committed for widening participation at national, regional and local level.

1.1 The Government shares the Committee's concern to develop a national system for measuring value added or learning gain. To do so effectively requires information on individual achievement over time. That is not currently available consistently.

The Government is consulting on the creation of a database covering all 14-21 year olds. This would permit accurate comparisons between all the strands of post-compulsory education and training in terms of participation and achievement. Its establishment will be subject to the outcome of a separate consultation on the collection of individual pupil data from schools.

1.1 The DfEE is considering performance measures against departmental objectives which will reflect participation among both 16-19 year olds and adults.

Chapter 7
Stimulating demand for learning: a coherent system of information, advice and guidance

The Government will publish and promote good quality information, advice and guidance about lifelong learning opportunities.

> *The Government should establish a national entitlement to information, advice and guidance as part of its strategy for post-16 learning [LW Ch 8]*

7.1 We have already taken action to ensure that all learners have easy access to information by today launching, as the first step in creating the Ufl, a new free national telephone information service – Learning Direct (0800 100 900). This will offer callers advice on learning packages to suit individual needs.

> *The Government should include the entitlement to guidance in the new learners' charter which should replace the charter for further education [LW Ch 8]; and*
>
> *should develop a comprehensive 'Charter for Learning', which should be promoted through a national publicity campaign and logo [LW Ch 8]*

7.2 The Government has given careful consideration to the suggestion of a learners' charter, but has decided that it would not be appropriate to introduce such a measure at this stage when there are so many other initiatives being introduced, and particularly before consultation on *The Learning Age* is complete. The introduction of a Learning Card will promote young people's entitlement to post-16 learning, and the Ufl logo is expected to become synonymous with easily accessible high quality learning opportunities.

> *The Government should ensure that an entitlement to guidance is included in any proposals to introduce learning accounts [LW Ch 8]*

7.3 Advice and guidance for individuals will be part of the package when ILAs are introduced.

> *The Government should evaluate the contribution of the new arrangements for the careers service to widening participation [LW Ch 8]*

7.4 Careers education and guidance have important contributions to make to widening participation. This is reflected in the Government's Investing in Young People strategy, in which the Careers Service will play an important part, focusing increasingly on those who need advice most. We will be setting targets for the Careers Service in its new role, and will evaluate its effectiveness against those, with a view to promoting continuing improvements.

The Government should legislate to make it a duty for all terrestrial television channels to educate as well as to entertain and inform [LW Ch 9]; and

should work with the BBC and independent broadcasters to explore the possibility of dedicated television channels to support learning [LW Ch 9]

7.5 *The Learning Age* recognises the valuable role of broadcasting in offering many accessible and exciting ways to learn. Terrestrial television channels already broadcast hundreds of hours of schools programmes; the Open University has been a pioneer of the use of broadcasting in learning; and the BBC's Computers don't bite campaign generated mass interest.

7.6 The Government welcomes the BBC's recent announcement that a digital learning channel will be launched next autumn. The growth in the number of satellite and cable channels and the introduction of digital technology will further increase the opportunities for educational programming in future.

The Government should take steps, in partnership with key national players, to create a mass demand for learning which includes the whole spectrum of the population [LW Ch 9]

7.7 Stimulating demand for learning – changing the culture to a learning culture – is critical to realising the Government's vision of a Learning Age. The Government cannot achieve this alone. It will require major collective effort. It will be a key issue for the University for Industry. FE colleges will have a major part to play. We are consulting widely on how best to succeed in this, through the publication of *The Learning Age*. To quote Helena Kennedy, in *Learning Works*:

"We are convinced that further education has a unique contribution to make to widening participation and the creation of a self-perpetuating learning society."

DfEE February 1998

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